Sentencing Statement by Linda Evans, Resistance Conspiracy Case 12/6/90

I'm standing here today to take responsibility for my actions. I'd like to explain how I came to be standing here in this court, some of the experiences that led to the choices in my life, and my plans and hopes for the future.

I consider myself a pretty ordinary person. I was raised in a small farm community in Iowa, with a loving family, amidst relatively sheltered surroundings. I feel grateful and honored that my parents have come to be here with me today. I was raised with values of hard work, love and concern for other people, belief in equal opportunity, and unselfishness. But when I attended college, I learned it was harder to achieve these values in the real world. I encountered racism and took a stand against it for the first time when the students of the Black Student Union sat in at the Administration Building, demanding open admissions, more Black faculty, and a Black Studies department. Their demands challenged my ignorance and my privilege. I joined the demonstrations; I was arrested for the first time; it was the first time I was dragged or beaten by the police. But it was not the last time. Unfortunately, today there are fewer Black students and fewer Black faculty at Michigan State than there were then.

At the same time, I was moved by the horrors of the Vietnam war to join the anti-war movement. In 1969 I was chosen to represent SDS on a delegation to bring back U.S. Prisoners-of-War who were being released by the Vietnamese in a gesture of friendship to the American people.

On that delegation, we travelled through North Vietnam to the border of the South, and witnessed incredible destruction. We saw a whole people mobilized to defend themselves--from schoolchildren to grandmothers. Everywhere we saw bomb craters, pieces of napalm, heard reports of the excruciating, endless burning of phosphorous bombs, saw the torn flesh of wounds caused by pellet bombs. In large towns, we saw miles of rubble. The only thing standing would be the remains of a hospital, marked by a single pillar with a red cross, or perhaps part of an archway of a 2000-year-old temple. This was racism escalated to genocide, the extermination of a whole people and their culture. I wept almost constantly.

I learned some of the most important lessons of my life from this experience. I learned the horrigying extent of violence that the U.S. government is willing to unleash to protect its interests--against a people determined only to define their own destiny, and to struggle for their freedom. I learned that the fact that the Vietnamese people had to take up arms to defend themselves against the violence of the U.S. did not mean that they became violent people--quite the contrary. The Vietnamese were the most gentle, generous, loving people I had ever met. The terrible toll in human life taken by the war made them treasure human life even more.

When I returned to live in Detroit, surveillance by the FBI intensified, SDS was heavily infiltrated, our houses were broken into. All this was part of COINTELPRO, the FBI's counter-intelligence program initiated to destroy the Black liberation movement and other progressive movements in the 1960's.

At the same time I witnessed the intense racism directed against the Black community in Detroit. My neighbors told me about their own terror as tanks drove down the middle of Detroit's streets, National Guard and police shooting blindly into houses. Wildcat strike actions were called by the Rbvolutionary Union of Black Workers against the institutional racism in Detroit's auto plants. That year, too, was a year of concentrated attacks against the Black Panther Party in Detroit and throughout the U.S. Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, George Jackson, and many other leaders of the Black liberation struggle were murdered. Scores of young Black men and women were imprisoned for struggling for justice and human rights.

My understandings of the world, and my life, were transformed by witnessing these large-scale racist attacks and the intensity of the war in Vietnam. I made a decision to take a stand on the side of oppressed people, and that hasn't changed in 20 years.

During the 1970's, I lived in Austin, Texas. I witnessed repeated attacks on Black, Native American, and Mexican people. The Ku Klux Klan lynched an effigy of a Black person and riddled it with automatic weapons fire on the edge of the Black community. My name was put on a death list along with other Black, Mexican, and white anti-Klan activists. The list was displayed inside inside a coffin surrounded by stacks of automatic weapons at a Klan rally. Throughout these years in Austin, I worked in many different ways to win social justice--from organizing to empower women and lesbians to fight against increasing violence against violence against women and children, to working in coalitions to support self-determination for Puerto Rico, Native American nations, and for nations in Africa, Central America, and the Middle East.

Over the years, I have been motivated by my own sense of morality to oppose racism in all its forms, and to try to stop U.S. efforts to dominate other nations. I've also been inspired by people all over the world who are struggling for freedom, by my own hopes for liberation, and that one day our children will live in a society that affirms life rather than subsidizing death. These aspirations have motivated all my actions, including those for which I'm taking responsibility today. I say this not to justify or defend those actions to you, but so you will understand my motivations for them, and their context in my life. The government says I believe that the ends justify the means, that I am a terrorist, and a violent criminal. None of this is true. I am not a violent person, nor a danger to society.

I would raise one other issue with you--not as a matter for debate, but to explain why this is important to me. I understand that at Marilyn Buck's sentencing, you advanced one definition of political prisoner--people who are in prison for holding "unpopular" political beliefs. This has been the Amnesty International definition for years. Yet under this definition, many world leaders, including Nelson Mandela and the leadership of the African National Congress and the United Democratic Front, would not be recognized as political prisoners.

There is increasing debate over the definition of political prisoner in the international arena. Amnesty International itself is considering a new category of political prisoner--persons convicted of politically-motivated criminal offenses, to recognize that ideas alone do not make change.

To me, the issue of political prisoners/Prisoners of War is not an abstract concept. Recognition of the existence of political prisoners in U.S. prisons is not a question of agreement with or defense of any particular action, but rather recognition of the political motivations behind the actions, and of the fact that we are part of movements for social change.

People in these movements have dedicated themselves to a vision of a just and peaceful society, where human rights are protected, not trampled on, where each human being can develop their full abilities and lead fulfilling, unexploited lives regardless of national origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or physical/mental capacity. This vision is a concrete goal, not a concrete dream.

During the last two years, I have been honored to meet many people with whom I share this goal. Many of them are here in the courtroom. They have enabled me to engage in political discussion, to be part of the political life of this community. They have contributed to my own political growth, my own processes of evaluation and development. I deeply respect their commitment to building a political movement.

Once again, the U.S. is preparing for war, poised on the edge of the desert with its army ready to kill and die for oil. The racism, violence, and homelessness in the streets of U.S. cities is escalating daily. Now more than ever I feel that the immediate need is to build a broad-based movement to change these policies. Even though it will be years from now, I know that the ways that I will be most effective will be as an educator and community organizer. I've worked inside prison as a peer counselor for prisoners with AIDS, and advocated for prisoners' rights. I hope to make even more of a contribution to this work whenever I may be released from prison. I look forward to rejoining my community and to working toward a better future and a better world for all of us.